Art of China
A Resource for Classroom Teachers
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the scene painted on this ceramic pillow. Who are the characters? What are they doing?
What do you think the game of chess might symbolize in this scene? What does it suggest about the characters who are playing?
What material do you think the pillow is made of? How do you imagine it would feel to sleep on a material like this?
The scenes and symbols decorating ceramic pillows were thought to have power over dreams. What might you dream of if you slept on this pillow?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the pose, facial features, and expression of this figure. What three words would you use to describe it?
How did the artist create a feeling of life and movement in this wooden sculpture?
This is Guanyin (KWAN-in) the bodhisattva of compassion. In Buddhism, a bodhisattva (bo-dee-SAHT-vah) is a divine, enlightened being.
Look closely at the figure’s face and hair. What clues are there that this might be a god?
What do you think the hole in the sculpture’s forehead originally held? What might it symbolize?
The sculpture was originally painted in bright colors and gold leaf.
Imagine what it would look like painted and gilded. How does your impression change?
In other parts of Asia, the bodhisattva of compassion is known as Avalokiteshvara (ah-vah-lo-kih-TESH-vah-rah).
Compare the sculpture of Guanyin to this representation of Avalokiteshvara from Thailand. Look at how they are posed, what they are wearing, and their facial expressions.
What is similar about them? What is different?
Find other examples from different cultures of how the bodhisattva of compassion is represented. What common characteristics can you find?
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Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
The designs on this Daoist (DOW-ist) priest’s robe are very complex. Choose one section to look at closely and describe it.
What colors do you see? What shapes do you see? What patterns do you see?
How many different animals can you find? Why do you think these animals are associated with worshipping the gods and the heavens?
How many different animals can you find? Why do you think these animals are associated with worshipping the gods and the heavens?
What other motifs from nature do you see?
Daoism teaches that human relationships should reflect the harmony and balance of nature.
These representations of three constellations were associated with the emperor’s three highest ministers.
White cranes were a symbol of Daoist priests. In ancient Chinese tradition, the priests rode cranes to the heavens to communicate with the gods.
The phoenix with two curly tail feathers symbolizes the yin, or female energy of the universe. The female phoenix was associated with the Chinese empress.
The dragon represents the *yang*, or male energy of the universe, and was associated with the Chinese emperor. Together, the dragon and the phoenix symbolize harmony and balance.
Trigrams, the sets of three lines decorating the sleeve borders of this robe, symbolize different combinations of yin and yang forces in nature.
The Eight Daoist Immortals were legendary figures believed to have attained immortality and are signified by their unique symbols: a fan, a flute, a sword, a flower basket, a double gourd, a pair of musical clappers, a bamboo drum with two rods, and a white lotus blossom.
What do you think this robe communicates about the person who wears it?
What do you think the symbols on your clothing communicate about you?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the features of this horse sculpture. What adjectives would you use to describe it?
Although it is a sculpture, the horse seems to be in motion.
How would you describe the way the horse is moving?
What did the sculptor do to give the horse a realistic sense of movement?
Heavenly Horses were said to move like snakes. Describe or draw the kind of line a snake makes when it moves.
Can you trace a line like this in the horse’s body?
Can you trace a line like this in the horse’s body?
Take a few moments to look carefully at these works of art.
Describe these figures on horseback. What do you think they are doing? How can you tell?
Two of the musicians are missing their instruments.
Look closely at their arms and hands. What kind of instruments do you think they used to play?
These musicians were found in a tomb in ancient China. Why do you think someone would be buried with objects like this?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
What textures and colors do you see in this sculpture?
Describe the pose and expression of the camel.
How would you describe its behavior?
How has the artist made it look lifelike?
In ancient China, camels carried goods for traders along the Silk Road. Look closely at the camel’s saddle. What is it carrying?
What clues does this camel give you about life in ancient China? What might it say about the person with whom it was buried?
What kind of animal would you want to take with you to the afterlife, and why?
This is another type of figure that has been found in the tombs of wealthy people.
What similarities do you notice between these two figures?
This figure is meant to be a guardian warrior. Describe the warrior’s pose and facial expression.
What might it have held in its hand?
What other clues does the object give you about its purpose?
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Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the appearance of the figure on this tile in as much detail as you can.
What is the figure doing? How can you tell?
What kinds of lines stand out in this design? Describe where you see them.
How did the artist use lines to create a sense of movement and energy?
Try to recreate the dancer’s movement with your own body. How does it feel?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
What words would you use to describe the dragon on this dish? Why?
Look for parts of nine different animals in the dragon. Can you find: a camel’s head, a horse’s mane, a deer’s antlers, and a cow’s ears?
Can you find: a snake’s body, a clam’s belly, a fish’s scales, a tiger’s paws, and an eagle’s claws?
What lines did the artist repeat to make the dragon's long body fit inside the round shape of the plate?
What feeling does this give the dragon?
This plate was made in the Netherlands in imitation of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain.
This more colorful plate was made in China for a Chinese audience.
Compare the decorative style of each plate to the dragon dish.
What similarities and differences do you notice?
What similarities and differences do you notice?
What can you learn from comparing these three plates about contact and exchange between China and Europe? What questions do you have?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the design of this saucer.
What do you see in the center?
What kind of decoration frames the center scene?
What colors do you see that tie together the border and center decoration of the saucer? Describe where you see them.
What is the setting of this scene? Who are the characters? Describe the action that is taking place.
This saucer was made in China by Chinese artisans. The characters depicted on it are from Roman mythology.
Their clothing and the setting are European.
What can you learn from this object about contact and exchange between China and the West? What questions do you have?
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Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
What colors do you see? What do the colors remind you of?
Describe the shape of the cup. What does it remind you of?
Imagine that you could touch this object. How do you think it would feel?
What three adjectives would you use to describe this cup?
What do you think an object like this says about the person who owns it?
What material do you think this object is made of?
How do you think it was made?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the flowers painted on this scroll.
How many different kinds do you see? How can you tell them apart?
Where do you see light brushstrokes? Where do you see dark brushstrokes?
Where do you see tall, thin plants? Where do you see short, broad plants?
What kinds of lines and shapes are repeated? How do you think the artist used a brush and ink to create them?
What mood or emotion do you think this painting expresses, and why?
This painting and poem portray sixteen different flowers of all four seasons blooming at the same time.
Imagine a place where this might happen. What is that place like? What does it feel like to be there?
Orchids and Rocks is a scroll created by a group of painters and poets working together. Compare Orchids and Rocks to Sixteen Flowers.
What is similar or different about the subject matter, composition, and painting style of these two scrolls?
This scroll was actually painted by three different artists.
Can you tell the difference between the work of one painter and another? Which details are clues?
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Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the painted decoration in this room. What colors, shapes, and designs do you see?
What do you think was the purpose of this room? How was it used, and how can you tell?
The characters on this carved wooden sign greeted visitors as they entered the room. What do you notice about the characters?
The character *fu* (foo), meaning happiness, is repeated five times.
The sign conveys blessings of health, wealth, a long life, love of virtue, and a peaceful death.
What can you infer from the design of this room about the room’s owner?
Symmetry was very important in the design of Chinese buildings. Can you find and describe examples of symmetry?
The plants, flowers, and colors used in the design of this room had symbolic meaning. Look for peony blossoms, a symbol of spring, and chrysanthemums, a symbol of fall.
What animals, plants, colors, or symbols would you use to decorate your home, and why?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the shape of this object. What does it remind you of?
Describe everything you see in the scene decorating this cup stand. What do you think is going on?
Many of the animals and plants in this picture are symbols of good fortune.
Can you think of animals or plants that symbolize, or stand for, something? For instance, many people believe that four-leaf clovers are signs of good luck.
The images on the cup stand form a rebus, a puzzle in which pictures stand in for words.
Magpie = que
Deer = lu
Wasp = feng
Monkey = hou
When you put these words together, they read: que-lu feng-hou (CHEUH-loo fung-ho) or, “May you receive high rank and salary.”
The word for “pointing to the sun” sounds like the word for “soon.”
This answer to this rebus is “May you soon rise in rank and salary.”
Can you use pictures of animals, like a bee or a deer, to make your own rebus?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe what you see. What colors, shapes, and lines are repeated in this design?
What do you think the animal is doing, and how can you tell? Describe the movement of its body and its facial expression.
This object is a badge that military officers or members of the nobility would have worn to show their status.
The animal on this rank badge is a mythical creature, called a *qilin* (chee-lin), made up of parts of other animals.
Look closely and describe the different parts. Notice that it has a scaly body, hooves of a deer, and a dragon’s head.
What can you infer from the design of this badge about the person who wore it?
Compare the uniform of a Chinese government official to clothing you wear in your everyday life. Can you find this official’s rank badge?
Do you ever wear a uniform? Where? What is its purpose?
How is your identity or belonging in a group represented by what you wear?
Take a few moments to look carefully at this work of art.
Describe the colors, lines, and patterns decorating this robe.
What kinds of lines make up the dragons’ bodies? What do they remind you of? Describe how they are moving.
Can you count the number of claws each dragon has?
The five-clawed dragon signifies the supreme power of the emperor.
In Chinese myth, dragons are believed to send rain down from the heavens to rivers, lakes, and oceans.
Can you find places in the design of this robe that connect the dragons to water? Describe what you see.
This mountain signifies that the wearer of the robe has a dragon’s power over clouds and rain.
This axe head signifies the wearer’s power over life and death.
A robe like this would only have been worn by the Chinese emperor. Use your imagination: How do you think it would feel to wear this robe?
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Pillow with Confucian Scholar, Buddhist Monk, and Daoist Priest, 1178 (Dading period, 1161–89), made in China (Gift of Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, 1957-26-1)

Guanyin Seated in Royal Ease, 1287-1368, made in China (Gift of Charles H. Ludington from the George Crofts Collection, 1925-53-11)

Avalokiteshvara, early 700s, made in Thailand (Purchased with the W. P. Wilstach Fund, W1965-1-1)

Daoist Priest’s Robe, around 1850-1900, made in China (Purchased with the George W.B. Taylor Fund, 1967-144-1)

Horse, 25-220, made in China (Gift of Jeffrey C. and Carol B. Blank, 2005-92-1)

Musicians on Horseback, 600s, made in China (Gift of Charles H. Ludington from the George Crofts Collection, 1923-21-146-150)

Tomb Figure of a Bactrian Camel, early to mid-700s, made in China (Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen, 1964-9-1)

Guardian Warrior, early to mid-700s, made in China (Gift of Charles H. Ludington from the George Crofts Collection, 1923-21-24)

Architectural Tile from Xiudingsi Pagoda, 600s, made in China (Purchased with Museum funds, 1929-17-3)

Dish with Dragon, early 1600s, made in China (Purchased with the Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1970-41-1)

Plate, 1725-50, made by the Porcelain Hatchet tile factory, Delft, Netherlands (Bequest of John W. Pepper, 1935-10-39)

Dish, 1662-1722 (Kangxi period, 1662–1722), made in China (Bequest of Lycia Thompson Morris, 1932-45-20)

Enamed Saucer, mid-1700s (Yongzheng period, 1723-1735), made in China (The Bloomfield Moore Collection, 1899-804b)

Flower-Form Cup, 1100s, made in China (Gift of the Far Eastern Art Committee in honor of Henry B. Keep, 1978-41-1)

Sixteen Flowers, 1500s, by Xu Wei (Purchased with the Fiske Kimball Fund and the Marie Kimball Fund, 1968-29-1)

Orchids and Rocks, 1606 (Wanli period, 1573-1620), by Chen Dao, Cao Xi, and Zhou Shichen (Purchased with the J. Stogdell Stokes Fund, 1968-9-1)

Reception Hall from the Palace of Duke Zhao (Zhaogongfu), first half of 1600s, made in China (Gift of Edward B. Robinette, 1929-163-1)

Lobed Cup Stand, early to mid-1600s, made in China (Purchased with the John T. Morris Fund, 1969-260-1a)

Rank Badge with Qilin, 1662-1722 (Kangxi period, 1662–1722), made in China (Purchased with the John T. Morris Fund from the Carl Schuster Collection, 1940-4-731)

First Rank Civil Official Wearing Semi-Formal Robes, late 1800s, made in China (Gift of Mrs. Hampton L. Carson, 1929-150-53)

Emperor's Dragon Robe, about 1840 (Daoguang period, 1821-1850), made in China (Purchased with Museum funds, 1951-29-7)

All artwork in this presentation is from the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art